



- With U.S. assistance, Laos joined the World Trade Organization in 2013.
- USAID partners with Laos to increase legal transparency and accountability, for example by developing an official online portal where people can comment on all draft laws.
- Lao officials can now factor in environmental and social considerations as they plan for major infrastructure development projects thanks to USAID support.
- Laos is strengthening its response to tuberculosis based on findings from a USAID-supported study.

Photo credit: USAID LEAF Program

Country Profile

Laos' growing importance on the world stage is a reflection of its 2013 accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), its membership in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), its shared borders with China, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand, and its unique position on the Mekong River, the lifeblood of mainland Southeast Asia. As Laos enters international markets, the United States is helping to improve the country's economic policies and increase its integration within the global economy.

USAID helps Laos modernize its economy while promoting sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. As trade opens Laos' borders to increased goods and investment partners, USAID also works to reduce the incidence of infectious diseases and pandemic threats.

OUR WORK

Laos was once one of the world's poorest countries. Now, this small, landlocked country of 6.6 million people is the fastest growing economy in Southeast Asia — fueled primarily by exports of copper and timber. However, equitable economic growth is not broadly shared and Laos retains some of the highest poverty levels in the region. Laos faces challenges achieving sustainable economic growth in the long run as its infrastructure development and economy are highly dependent on regional demand for its finite natural resources. Additionally, emerging zoonotic diseases are real threats to public health, livelihoods and food security in Laos.

With roughly 60 million people in the Lower Mekong sub-region directly dependent on the Mekong River for food, livelihoods, water and transportation, it is in the interest of the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) to ensure that sound social and environmental safeguards are in place for all development projects that impact the river basin.

USAID implements both bilateral and regional programs in Laos that assist with improved economic growth and trade and address the environment, climate change and key global health issues. Throughout the country, USAID projects help the Lao people modernize the economy in a sustainable manner, protect natural resources and improve their quality of life.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND TRADE

Even though the Lao economy has been growing rapidly in recent years, it remains relatively undiversified and heavily dependent on foreign market demand for its natural resources, particularly mining, hydropower and forestry. This growth has not been broadly shared among the population and the economy remains susceptible to external shocks. Regulatory capacity and knowledge of market economics within the Government of the Lao PDR is limited and a concern for expanding future growth.

To promote a diversified economy and more sustainable, broadly-shared equitable growth, USAID is helping Laos take full advantage of its recent accession to the WTO by improving the legal and regulatory environment for trade and investment. For instance, USAID helped Laos pass intellectual property rights legislation to meet international standards as well as WTO and U.S.-Laos Bilateral Trade Agreement requirements. Public awareness of Lao government commitments to comply with international economic obligations has increased through USAID-funded workshops, training and technical assistance. USAID's programs encourage active participation by Lao government ministries, the National Assembly and the private sector in economic development planning and discussion with ASEAN, WTO and other regional organizations.

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT

USAID partners with Laos to address the transboundary environmental issues facing countries in the Lower Mekong Region. USAID assists the Government of the Lao PDR in improving forest management practices that reduce carbon emissions from land use and in helping communities become more resilient to the adverse impacts of climate change. For example, USAID is helping to develop forest management plans in two provinces while promoting a greater decision-making role for women in land-use planning. Additionally, USAID is promoting sustainable green development and better social and environmental safeguards for infrastructure in Laos and throughout the region. Since Laos is situated between Southeast Asia and China — the leading global consumer of illegal wildlife and animal parts — USAID is raising awareness in the region of the illegal wildlife trade and supporting the ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network's efforts to combat it.

GLOBAL HEALTH

USAID helps reduce the incidence of infectious diseases, including HIV, malaria, tuberculosis (TB), dengue fever and pandemic threats, such as avian influenza. With USAID support, the Government of the Lao PDR conducted a comprehensive TB prevalence survey and is using the results to strengthen its national response. Due in part to USAID's HIV prevention, testing, treatment and support activities, HIV prevalence among female sex workers — one of the populations most susceptible to transmission — has remained at under 1 percent in Laos over the past five years.

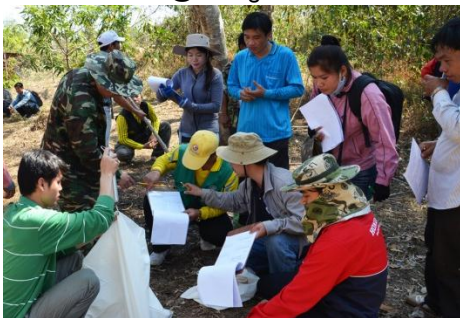
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Lao trainees calculate the biomass in trees to better inform conservation efforts and sustainably manage forest resources. Photo credit: USAID LEAF Program



A Lao researcher studies biodiversity to increase regional expertise under a USAID-funded science program. Photo credit: Richard Nyberg, USAID

Front page photo caption: USAID partners conduct participatory land-use planning to help protect the livelihoods of forest dwellers in northern Laos.